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DURBIN GRADED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE  
FROM 1938-1946**

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**BY  
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## SOME REFLECTIONS OF A DURBIN GRADED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE FROM 1938 - 1946

The announcement of a planned Durbin Graded School Reunion has caused me to pause and reflect on some of my experiences at the school. I would like to share some of them with you.

I would like you to take a short trip with me that begins at the bottom of the steps as a 5-6 year old. As I look up those steps toward the schoolhouse, I know exactly how many there are—4 million 500 thousand and one. I also know that it takes two years to walk to the top.

When you get there and enter the school, there is a room on the right that is the boiler room. There Frank Moore, the school custodian, has his office. Mr. Moore only has one arm having lost his right one in some accident. I asked him about it one time and he told me how hard it was to learn to do everything with his left arm especially writing.

If one proceeds one will reach the Boy's Bathroom. Mr. Moore kept this clean but it was an ugly place. Beyond the boy's bathroom was a dark and forbidden place called the Girl's Bathroom. No one that I knew ever ventured there.

Returning to the front of the school and up the stairs, one was met by older girls selling candy. They were the nicest girls and I especially remember Polly Kisner who had the most beautiful smile in the world.

Behind the candy place were steps leading up to the Principal's Office. The thing I remember most about this is my Dad typing letters and reports. He used only his two fore-fingers and to this day I cannot type faster nor with more accuracy than he.

To the right of the Office was the Lunch Room. My Dad worked very, very hard to have a lunch program. Durbin was the first school in the State to have one. He believed that every child should have at least one hot meal a day. To help support the program, he would hold cake walks in the gym. The people of the community knew the purpose of them and gave great support. The ladies would make the best tasting and most attractive cakes. I remember afterwards my Dad sitting at our kitchen table that night counting the dimes that were collected.



To the right of the Lunch Room and down a hall was the Gym/Auditorium. Not only were cakewalks held there but other activities as well. One was a series of basketball games for both boys and girls that were held during the lunch period. Between games my Father would stand in the middle of the floor and shoot baskets. He never missed. Most people did not realize that he was an All-American basketball player at D&E College. He would hold the ball in both hands to shoot. When he did this you could see the crooked little finger on his left hand. When asked how he got this, he would answer that he was shadow boxing with a fellow who had a crooked nose. His little finger went up the man's nose and when he pulled it out his finger was crooked.

Graduations were also held in here. Graduations were a big thing to my Dad. He said that for many of these children, this would be the only graduation they would ever have and it should be a special occasion. One year I helped Mrs. Hill decorate the stage. We went outside and collected orange honeysuckle that was in bloom. She made the stage into a beautiful place. The girls were dressed in pastel dresses and wore corsages given to them by the school. The boys wore coats and ties. There was always a noted speaker. A few names I recall were Senator Jennings Randolph, Congressman Harley Staggers, Principal Edgel Dean of Richwood High School, and Coach Alex Vanerri a W.Va. sports personality. A gong was sounded and each student's name was read. They marched across the stage and received their diplomas given to them by Superintendent of Schools, Max Brooks.

The Auditorium was the scene of my greatest triumph and most embarrassing one. Both involved Sam Moyers. At an assembly, he and I sang a song made popular by Spike Jones; "Right in the Furher's Face". We got encore after encore. My disgrace involved Sam as well. He was supposed to recite "In Flanders's Field" at an assembly. Well on the day of the assembly Sam was absent. Everyone said that I could do it. So I got on stage and recited, "In Flanders's Field the poppy's grow amid the crosses row on row." Then my mind went blank. Mrs. Hill was off stage and had to feed me each line that I in turn repeated. I died a thousand deaths.

Across the hall from the candy Store were two rooms, the Second and First grades. My first grade teacher was Violet Hoover. There never was a nicer person. I remember a table in the room that had colored blocks and beads on it. Sometimes we were allowed to play with them. My Dad would come to visit during his rounds and would pick up the blocks and juggle



them to our delight. Also, near Christmas time, the face of Santa Claus would often appear at the door window to the delight of us all.

Mrs. Wilson was my second grade teacher. Was there a more perfectly neat person in the world? There never was a hair out of place. I loved to go to her desk. She smelled so good. She had a fake store front made out of orange crates which she used as part of a game, "playing store", to teach us how to count money. One time, the Pocahontas County Fair was being held and she asked us to make a Dutch Shoe out of clay so it could be entered in the Fair. I was struggling with this and looked over at Estelle Hickman who was making a small sized shoe. I suppose he didn't know what a Dutch "wooden" shoe looked like and he made a moccasin. I copied his model and made a Dutch Shoe that won a red ribbon at the Fair. The idea was Estelle's

When one reached the top of the stairs of the second floor, the room facing you was the library. On the right was the 6<sup>th</sup> grade room and next to the library was the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Across the hall was the 5<sup>th</sup> grade room. Down the hall on the left was the 8<sup>th</sup> grade room, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade room and at the end the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade room.

I loved the third grade. Mrs. Williams was the nicest teacher. She had a wonderful voice. It along with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades were significant as these were the only grades in which I didn't get a lickin'.

It was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I made my mark. It was the first time that I remember ever defying authority. Miss Hull was our teacher and one of her techniques during recess was to grab a bit of your hair and pull and shake it if you acted up. This hurt like the devil so I went to Barber McNeil and had him cut off my hair. The next time She did this to me she kept trying to find hair to grab but couldn't. I remember with great satisfaction smiling in triumph through this entire incident. One day she gave me a lickin'. Afterwards my dad came into the room and someone asked him if he knew what Miss Hull had done to Bennie? He said no and they told him. I was watching Miss Hull. She was very nervous. I thought it doesn't get any better than this. My Dad said in a very loud voice, "Miss Hull, if Ben needs a whipping you give it to him and if you can't handle him, send him to me and I'll do it." I was ruined. Miss Hull took him to heart and for everything I had done, was doing, and would do she had only one chance and took it. I got 87 lickin's that year. Perhaps this is an exaggeration as it probably was only 86. One day I found a big old carpet tack. One of the most gratifying things I have ever done was to put that tack on Miss. Hull's chair. I knew she would see it but the simple act of just putting it there gave me the greatest satisfaction.



One activity she liked was to have spelling bees. I couldn't spell worth a darn. In those days no one ever heard of dyslexia and those like me were thought of just being dumb. It got so bad that I would deliberately miss the first word even if I knew how to spell it just to avoid further disgrace. The spelling book had words for every grade through the 12<sup>th</sup>. Gloria Dean Eye, Kitty Spencer, Ella Freeman, and Betty Slaven would spell them all. It was something to watch. Also, Gloria Dean was the prettiest girl in the class. She had long legs and wore short dresses. It was lots of fun dropping pencils on the floor and watching her pick them up.

Miss Hope Hull was a teacher I did not like but as Mrs. Hope Mallow, she was a person I loved and admired.

Mrs. Parg was our fifth grade teacher. She had the nicest smile and the best laugh. She would write information on the blackboard that we had to copy down. We memorized it and then had to stand in front of the class and recite it back. I memorized my way through the fifth grade.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade we grew up. We didn't have one teacher but several during the day. Mrs. Hill was our homeroom teacher and taught us music. She was beautiful. She was also the hardest paddler in the school. Man could she hit--ask Estelle Hickman. One time the class acted up and she gave the entire class a whippin'. I knew it was going to hurt but it was worth it to see those old girls get it too. Heck, when she got to the girls she only gave them a little o' tap. Man, what disappointment. Mrs. Hill also formed a Tonet Band. We all bought tonets to play. My best friend was Bill Mullinex who had music in his soul. He could really make that thing talk and he taught me to play his favorite song, "Red River Valley". While the rest of the class was learning "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star", Bill and I were swinging on Red River Valley. Mrs. Hill got so mad at us she kicked us out of the band and we never did play with them. During 6th grade we also studied West Virginia History, which I hated. I remember Estelle Hickman saying that his older brother and his Father read his entire book because they liked it so much; what a downer.

Our 7<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom teacher was Miss Ruth Kramer. Her family owned the Greenbrier Hotel where she lived. She was very religious and very nice. To get her off any topic we would ask her a question about religion and she was off. Mrs. Kramer didn't give me a lickin' but my Dad did. There were certain rules that were inviolate. One was playing marbles near the school. One could play at the bottom of the hill but only at special times and not next to the school. Some friends and I snuck out, played a game, and got caught. My Dad took us to the library, bent us over the table, and gave us three whacks with a big old college initiation paddle that he



brought up from the floor. I got through this o.k. The second time we snuck off and went down to the foot of the hill during school recess, which was forbidden, and got caught again. Dad took us to the library but this time gave us six hard whacks. Afterwards I had a few tears in my eyes and he asked me what was wrong. I told him that he hit us harder this time than before. He said that when you come before a judge he is always harder on you the second time than the first. I knew that I didn't want to try it a third time and never did.

Three things happened during my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. Kenton Wilmoth and his nephew George came off Allegheny Mountain and someone hit me in the head with a rock and fractured my skull. Mr. Wilmoth was our teacher, George became a best friend, and I missed my 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip. Mr. Wilmoth was a very handsome man. I loved to see him write on the chalkboard. I have never seen penmanship like his. He obviously took great pride in it. He also carried a leather strap in his back pocket and wore sponge-soled shoes. If you were acting up, he would sneak up on you and hit you with that leather strap. It didn't particularly hurt but did make a loud crack and got his point across. He lived on the Old Pike near the Confederate campgrounds. From time to time he would bring in Minnie balls that were washed out when it rained. Some had holes drilled in them and he told us that when it rained the powder in the guns got wet and the soldiers had to reload them. The ends of their ramrods had a small screw which would allow them to screw onto the lead Minnie ball and pull it out of the gun.

My Dad taught us arithmetic. I remember being amazed at how good a teacher he was. As a retired educator with thirty-eight years experience, I am still amazed at his teaching skills.

My Dad always had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip for the class. He felt that students should see a college and the State Capitol. I did not make the trip with my class due to my accident but did so the next year. My friend Bruce Bosley took me under his wing. The college we visited was W.Va. Wesleyan. The thing we students wanted to see most were the "pickled babies" in the biology lab. These were aborted fetuses preserved in formaldehyde. Not only did we see the State Capitol but also visited Prunty Town where boys and girls were sent if they were bad, and the home for the insane at Weston. After that visit I knew that I never wanted to revisit either place. We also ate lunch in a cafeteria that was a first time experience for us. Parents drove us in their personal cars. A culminating activity was the class picture taken on the Capital steps.



So this is a brief description my Durbin Graded School experience. It is one that I would not have missed for anything in the World.

Benjamin F. Poscover  
July 17, 2004

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The Durbin Graded School Staff in the attached picture is not the staff when I attended DGS. It was:

Principal:	Max Poscover
Grade 1:	Violet Hoover
Grade 2:	Margaret Wilson
Grade 3:	Frona Williams
Grade 4:	Hope Hull
Grade 5:	Marie Parg
Grade 6:	Bonnie Hill
Grade 7:	Ruth Kramer
Grade 8:	Kenton Wilmoth

The names of the individuals in the photograph are:

Principal:	Max Poscover
Grade 1:	Jean Gragg
	Ruth Jennings
	Rives Keagley
Grade 2:	Margaret Wilson
Grade 3:	Frona Williams
Grade 4:	Hope Mallow
Grade 5:	Marie Parg
Grade 6:	Margaret Jack
Grade 7:	Ruth Kramer
Grade 8:	Kenton Wilmoth







